

Testimony on Senate Bills 414, 415, and 981

Autism Coverage

March 1, 2012

Good Afternoon, Senator Marleau and members of the Senate Health Policy Committee:

I am Linda Burghardt, Executive Director of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Michigan which represents people with mental illness and their families throughout Michigan.

NAMI Michigan supports passage of **comprehensive mental health parity legislation**, with the goal of providing broad and affordable mental health insurance coverage for all mental health disorders, including coverage for autism. We are opposed to insurance policies that exclude autism or any other valid diagnosis or chronic or disabling disorder. We, however, do not support legislation that singles out particular disorders for coverage.

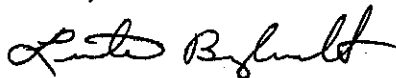
NAMI Michigan represents members who suffer from one or more of the entire spectrum of mental illnesses. We cannot support the provision of special guaranteed treatment for those with one particular disorder or set of disorders without providing parity of services to those who are suffering from other equally serious and debilitating, but treatable, disorders. We cannot discriminate against many, if not most, of our members. We must do whatever we can to help **everyone** who needs mental health services.

Highly effective treatments exist today for many biological brain disorders, including autism, with success rates often greater than treatment of other medical conditions. The National Institute of Mental Health has shown that the success rates of treatment for schizophrenia (60%), depression (70% to 80%), and panic disorder (90%) surpass those of other medical conditions such as heart disease (45% to 50%). Prevention and early intervention measures and parity of coverage can be as effective in restoring individuals with these mental health disorders to full health as they can be for individuals with autism.

Comprehensive mental health coverage would do much to ensure that all of Michigan's vulnerable citizens who are suffering with mental illness are treated fairly under the law and have an equal opportunity to achieve health and recovery. NAMI Michigan has supported, and will continue to support, coverage initiatives designed to restore and maintain the mental and emotional health of all of our citizens, including those with autism, — a goal many of the 43 states with mental health parity laws are currently achieving.

Thank you for supporting comprehensive mental health parity.

Sincerely,



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